

Heroine must take the right path; Review

The Toronto Star

March 15, 2019 Friday

Copyright 2019 Toronto Star Newspapers Limited

Section: ENTERTAINMENT; Pg. E2

Length: 446 words

Byline: Peter Howell Toronto Star

Body

The droll absurdity of Nordic cinema acquires an eco-terrorism edge in *Woman at War*, a movie filled with dualities and one singular performance.

This second dramatic feature by Iceland's Benedikt Erlingsson (*Of Horses and Men*) opens with a brazen act both comic and not: an eco-activist named Halla (Halldora Geirharosdottir) uses a bow and arrow to bring down a major power line on a hill outside Reykjavik.

Halla, 50, aims to stop construction of an aluminum smelter she fears will destroy the natural beauty of her rural space, gloriously rendered by cinematographer Bergsteinn Bjorgulfsson. The low-tech vandalism gets high-tech results - lights blink off and the smelter is forced to switch to oil-fired auxiliary power, and it's soon clear this isn't a one-off protest.

Halla is adept at causing mayhem for the aluminum company and its political accomplices. She also takes down surveillance drones and dodges security helicopters while resourcefully evading capture. At one point she even uses a dead sheep as camouflage.

Sensation-seeking journalists dub her "Mountain Woman" but nobody knows her identity, apart from a compassionate sheep farmer (Johann Siguroarson) and Halla's friend Baldvin (Jorundur Ragnarsson), who is sympathetic to Halla's cause despite being a government official.

And who would even suspect the cheerful Halla? Her "day job" is directing an adult choir, of which Baldvin is a member. The only person more chill than Halla is her twin sister, Asa (also played by Geirharosdottir), a yoga instructor and meditation advocate.

The scenario so far seems more thriller than laughter, but Erlingsson introduces surreal amusements to lighten the tone. Halla is cheered on by not one but two Greek choruses - or rather an Icelandic instrumental trio and three Ukrainian folk singers - and apparently only she can see them.

The mood shifts yet again when Halla receives a letter informing her that the adoption she has been seeking for four years has finally been approved. She can soon become mother to a young girl from Ukraine, which forces a difficult choice: should she continue her activism on behalf of Mother Earth, which is likely to lead to imprisonment, or abandon her protests to embrace motherhood?

The story doesn't always shift gears smoothly, but Geirharosdottir never slips. She's in command of both of her characters, mostly impressively so in scenes where she has to play both Halla and Asa at the same time.

Woman at War

Heroine must take the right path; Review

(out of 4)

Starring Halldora Geirharosdottir, Jorundur Ragnarsson and Johann Siguroarson. Written by Benedikt Erlingsson and Olafur Egilsson. Directed by Benedikt Erlingsson. Opens Friday at TIFF Bell Lightbox. 100 minutes. PG

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: COLUMN

Publication-Type: NEWSPAPER

Subject: ECOTERRORISM (90%); FILM (90%); MAMMALS (90%); NEGATIVE NEWS (90%); NEGATIVE MISC NEWS (89%); TWINS & MULTIPLE BIRTHS (89%); TRENDS & EVENTS (79%); FILM DIRECTORS (78%); SINGERS & MUSICIANS (78%); TERRORISM & COUNTERTERRORISM (78%); WRITERS (78%); CINEMATOGRAPHY (73%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (73%); SURVEILLANCE (73%); TERRORISM (73%); VISUAL ARTISTS (73%); VANDALISM (71%); PLANT CONSTRUCTION (70%); MUSIC GROUPS & ARTISTS (69%); SURVEILLANCE & RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT (67%); FOLK & WORLD MUSIC (66%); YOGA (63%); SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGY (53%)

Industry: FILM (90%); FILM DIRECTORS (78%); MOVIE RELEASE DATES (78%); SINGERS & MUSICIANS (78%); WRITERS (78%); ALUMINA & ALUMINUM PRODUCTION (75%); CINEMATOGRAPHY (73%); VISUAL ARTISTS (73%); PLANT CONSTRUCTION (70%); MUSIC GROUPS & ARTISTS (69%); AUTONOMOUS VEHICLES (67%); HELICOPTERS (67%); SHEEP FARMING (67%); SURVEILLANCE & RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT (67%)

Geographic: REYKJAVIK, ICELAND (73%); ICELAND (90%); UKRAINE (90%)

Load-Date: March 15, 2019

End of Document